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THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD TEACHING AS A BASIS FOR LASTING INTEREST IN LATIN¹

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In the noise and glare of the pedagogical skyrockets that are now being sent up for the delectation of "the greater half," it is difficult at times to see plainly and to think clearly. Before the dazzling picture of the schools of tomorrow, wherein school life (I quote from a recent article in *Education*) having "ceased to be a time of tiring tasks and of stupid sitting at rows of desks . . . will include the most interesting and enjoyable things," the Latin teacher may be forgiven if, in his bewilderment, he begins to question whether draping a class in Roman togas may not, after all, be the *sine qua non* of his day's work, and the aggregation of classical jokes the chief end of his labors.

Because of the present-day cry, "Education without effort, conscious or subconscious," there is danger that the Latin teacher, in his desire to brighten the classical corner, may overemphasize certain adjuncts of the work, legitimate and valuable in themselves, and subordinate the one great central matter—the fine art of teaching. Similarly there is as real a danger that he may fail to secure for his subject a place in the schools of tomorrow—a place that he believes it deserves—by underestimating the great opportunity that is his.

The future of the classics, as has been affirmed many times, is in the hands of the classical teacher. A fact so obvious can only command attention by continued reiteration. Never was there a more opportune moment for this restatement than the present, when "The Case against the Classics" and "Greek and Latin to the Junk Heap" are being featured in the magazines and daily newspapers alike, and when not only parents but (what is vastly

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more important) children are deciding that no safe and sane educational course ever includes the classics. Whether Latin is to be relegated to the limbo of lost causes or is to survive in successful competition with acclaimed subjects of the new curriculum will depend entirely, I believe, upon the degree of proficiency with which the classical teacher does his work in the next ten years. Classical games, classical scrapbooks, classical magazines, classical clubs, classical plays, even classical rooms—and one or two favored schools we know have been able to build these beautiful shrines to the classics—can call forth no abiding interest in classical studies unless behind them are Greek and Latin classrooms where live, honest work is being done by both teachers and pupils. Good teaching, we must all agree, is the basis, the middle, the top, the all, of the Latin problem.

Disquieting though this sense of responsibility may be, it nevertheless carries with it a realization of opportunity which is at once encouraging and stimulating. The essentials of good teaching are to be discussed later in this program. I should like to define as exactly as I may just what is this opportunity, and to speak too of the responsibility that rests upon every teacher of the classics because this opportunity is open to him.

In considering his opportunity it is impossible not to think first of the "state of preparedness" of the classical teacher. How well equipped is he for meeting his responsibility? If one may judge from the results of the College Entrance Examination Board, or if we may believe Dr. Eliot, the Latin teacher is as well trained as any other teacher. According to the last reports of the College Entrance Examination Board, Greek and Latin are among the best-taught subjects today. Dr. Eliot finds that "pupils in secondary schools formerly got through Latin the best training that they received, because their teachers of Latin were the best teachers and the classical schools were the best schools." He goes on to say that teachers of other subjects have gradually become equally scholarly and skilful, until they can teach girls and boys to observe, to think, and to remember as well as do the teachers of Greek and Latin in their traditional subjects. "At least," he is careful to add, "they think they can." There is probably no Latin teacher

worthy of his high calling who does not at times convict himself of incompetence. Yet it would seem that, whatever may be his own consciousness of inadequacy, on the lips of his critics he is credited with having an *equipment at least equal to that of other instructors*.

Furthermore, the fact that the Latin teacher has been under fire for forty years should render him a seasoned veteran, calm and resourceful under attack, and quick to seize a strategic base of the enemy when it is exposed. The contempt of danger which he manifested by indifference at first, when the conflict was begun by the scientists, under the later onslaughts of the modern-language people he has replaced with a more intelligent understanding of the seriousness of the situation. Now after forty years he not only has the benefit of this long experience, but has been able, under the attack of the vocationalists, to turn his former foes into allies, as was recently pointed out by President J. Douglas Bruce in an admirable address before the Modern Language Association, at Princeton. Professor Bruce explained this happy event by saying that "experience soon proved that the overthrow of the authority of the classics in the educational scheme tended to weaken immeasurably all along the line the general position of literary studies as distinguished from purely practical linguistic instruction."

It does not seem unlikely that in view of the banal type of work in English which is now being recommended by our self-styled "philosophers of education," another powerful ally may be found in the innumerable cohorts of the English teachers who already are objecting to a scheme which makes possible the substitution of Robert Chambers for Matthew Arnold, and accounts of the "Salamander" for character studies of Maggie Tulliver. Since, too, it is proposed in the modern school to teach only the elements of arithmetic and such bits of geometry as are adapted strictly to so-called practical needs, there may be a further large increment for the allied army from the mathematics section.

With this fusion of forces is coming a clearer understanding and an appreciation of one another's purposes and work which must improve methods of teaching. We are not only learning from each other new ways—better ways—of doing the same thing, but coordinating the teaching of our various subjects toward more definite

ends. Arthur C. Benson, in a thoughtful article entitled "Education after the War," complains that subject after subject has been forced into the school curriculum, but without any radical attempt at co-ordination, with the result that smattering has been the characteristic note. With the loosening of college-entrance requirements the Latin teacher is now able, as never before, to modify and adapt his method, not alone to the needs of his own subject, but to the aims of other departments. The charge frequently pronounced against the method of teaching Latin, that it is too cramped and too technical, has not been unfounded. Latin, like some other subjects, has been taught as if it were the student's sole means of grace in an unrighteous world. More recently, however, its manifest advantages as a foundation for the study of Western languages have pointed a turning for the classical path that should lead straight into the highway to which all language training tends. When carefully co-ordinated with the teaching of English and of the modern languages the teaching of Latin cannot bring the pupil to that cul-de-sac so frequently declared by caviling critics to be its only end. The work now being done in the Woodward High School in Cincinnati is a striking illustration of the way in which Latin may be taught as a living language when identified with Spanish. Numerous reports in our invaluable *Classical Journal* bear witness to the interesting methods of co-ordinating Latin and English which are being worked out in high schools all over the country.

It is a part of the opportunity of the classical teacher to make for his subject a place in the school curriculum second to that of no other subject. But in his effort to do this he must disprove the contention that his method, because of its narrow technical character, destroys interest and leaves youth painfully ignorant of human life and of the world in which we live. The charge of "spiral methods which are only a dusty staircase leading into an empty, dreary attic" is a form of complaint that is being brought now against most forms of instruction. In proof of this general indictment one modern educator points out that teachers are, as a rule, persons who are taken while young with only such training as the schools afford, and set at teaching in the schools; that in

their institutes and societies they study methods, but having little acquaintance with real life they have no way of knowing whether the things they do are valuable to society or not. To understand the needs of everyday life and to relate his subject by skilful teaching to those needs is the first demand made today upon every teacher. Miss Sabin's *Manual*, the most valuable contribution that has been made to classical teaching, has interpreted for the Latin teacher the vastness of his opportunity for satisfying this demand. As a result there are being developed in Latin classrooms, north, south, east, and west, vitalized methods whose aim is to emphasize the practical side of Latin.

The fighting chance of the classics is very nearly, if not altogether, as good as that of the newer subjects, since even Dr. Eliot finds that "nothing but long experience can fully demonstrate that the new subjects and the new methods are capable of producing as powerful and serviceable men and women as have developed under the old régime, and that for one generation at least there will be many parents who will prefer that the experiment of omitting Latin be tried on other people's children rather than on their own." Here Dr. Eliot seems not to share the exuberance of those educational theorists who in their rosy forecast for the school of the future spell all plans as perfection, and fail to differentiate between purpose and result.

While striving to take advantage of the opportunity that is afforded him, the Latin teacher will be heartened by remembering that the present educational situation is a logical development in the period through which we are now passing. Everywhere we find a general swerving away from tradition and a noisy exploitation of the novel and bizarre. Nowhere is this better shown than in those characteristic forms of our present type of culture, the movie, the pocket theater, ragtime, squalid poetry, and cubist art. In all these there is a violent insistence that people "sit up and take notice," and yet if as an outcome of the new pedagogical theories that are being proclaimed with such confidence and aggressiveness the teacher not only sits up and takes notice, but, seeking his own answer to educational questions, begins to *think*, it is inconceivable that the consequences upon his work shall be entirely bad. It is in-

conceivable, too, that out of this groping for purposes and methods which will be better suited to the new educational problems of our democracy there shall not be evolved a new order of training better than, though different from, the old.

It is for the Latin teacher to take what the present offers—psychological tests and all—adapting what is good in the new even while he holds fast to the best in the old; never forgetting that this is a part of his opportunity, and that upon its use depends the status of the classics in the schools of tomorrow. In the working out of common problems with other departments, in the adaptation of classroom methods to present needs, his is the high privilege of untiring effort; in the vision of the full development of the individual student, his the inspiration of noble standards and of noble hopes; and finally, through all effort and above all vision, his is that “*χάρμη*” with which men of old came to their testing.